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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 13, 1997

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OPENING STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE CURT WELDON
CHAIRMAN, RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
HEARING ON RUSSIAN MISSILE DETARGETING AND NUCLEAR DOCTRINE

March 13, 1997

This morning, the Military Research and Development Subcommittee meets in open session to receive testimony on Russian missile detargeting and nuclear doctrine.

Although the Cold War is over, the Russian nuclear threat still poses a serious threat to the United States and its national interests. Russia retains thousands of nuclear warheads, ready to launch on a moment's notice, capable of destroying Western civilization. Although relations between the United States and Russia have greatly improved, we cannot afford to become complacent about the fact that even one nuclear missile strike on U.S. soil is totally unacceptable.

Diplomacy alone is not a reliable barrier to the Russian nuclear threat. Russia is still a nuclear superpower, and there is cause for concern over the potential instability of the current political structure in Russia.

For the past several years, President Clinton and senior Administration officials have claimed, on over 100 occasions, that America has been removed from Russia's "nuclear bull's-eye". American cities are no longer targeted by Russian missiles. As recently as March 11, Anthony Lake, in Senate confirmation hearings for the Director of Central Intelligence, claimed "the possibility of an accidental launch by Russia has been very significantly reduced as a result of detargeting."

The assertion that Americans are no longer targeted by Russian missiles is based on the Moscow Declaration of January 1994, the so-called "detracting agreement," in which Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin agreed that the United States and Russia would no longer aim strategic missiles at each other. In practical terms, this meant that both countries removed target coordinates from the missile guidance systems, but stored the targeting data locally. The important, but never mentioned fact is that missiles could be re-targeted at the United States in a matter of minutes or seconds.

My understanding is that we cannot independently verify that the Russians have in fact detracting their missiles. A letter dated July 1, 1996 from then Secretary of Defense Perry, replying to queries on detracting from the National Security Committee, admits that "there are no procedures to verify detracting." Perry's letter failed to answer

questions about the reversibility of detargeting on the Russian side, but acknowledged that for detargeted U.S. missiles, “missile crews could quickly reconfigure equipment to prepare to launch missiles.”

The technical terms of the detargeting agreement do not appear to support President Clinton’s claim that, “For the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age, there is not a single Russian missile pointed at America’s children.” This assertion is in fact highly misleading. Americans should feel—justifiably—angry and betrayed to learn that, in fact, the detargeting agreement has made no significant contribution to lowering the nuclear threat against the United States, just as they are shocked whenever told that the United States presently has no defenses against these missiles.

While the Clinton Administration misses no opportunity to advertise that the detargeting agreement has supposedly reduced or canceled the Russian nuclear threat, the Administration never seems to say anything about Russia’s development of a disturbing new nuclear doctrine.

Even as recent statements by high-ranking Russian officials indicate that Russia’s economic deterioration could weaken control over its nuclear forces, there are disturbing reports of a new military doctrine that relies more heavily on nuclear weapons and striking first. We should all be concerned by the possibility that deteriorating control over nuclear forces, combined with new emerging doctrinal dependency on nuclear first use, could increase the risk of a Russian nuclear attack through miscalculation.

Russian Defense Minister Igor Rodionov announced on February 7, “No one today can guarantee the reliability of our control systems...Russia might soon reach the threshold beyond which its rockets and nuclear systems cannot be controlled.” A few months earlier, on October 25, 1996, Defense Minister Rodionov had joined Aleksandr Lebed, then chief of the Russian Security Council, in warning that “the chronic lack of funds is taking the armed forces to the brink of undesirable, and even uncontrollable, developments” including possibly a widespread mutiny.

Some Administration representatives have dismissed these Russian predictions as propaganda, calculated to increase Russian defense spending. However, the warnings are consistent with an alleged top secret CIA report, *Prospects for Unsanctioned Use of Russian Nuclear Weapons*, leaked to the *Washington Times* in October 1996 that concluded: “The Russian nuclear command and control system is being subjected to stresses it was not designed to withstand as a result of wrenching social change, economic hardship, and malaise within the armed forces.”

While Russia’s command and control system—including early warning radars and satellites—is being subjected to unprecedented strains, Russia’s offensive nuclear firepower continues as a formidable threat, and recent CIA briefings to this committee confirm that Russia’s nuclear capabilities are currently being modernized in a number of areas.

Thus, while Russia’s technical means and operational competence to launch a nuclear attack is undiminished or improving, the technical and psychological capability of Russian forces to accurately assess the threat environment may be diminishing.

We are here today to gather the views of a panel of independent experts about the implications of Russian missile detargeting and the new military doctrine for the nuclear threat.

We have with us today:

Dr. Bruce Blair
Brookings Institution

Dr. J. Michael Waller
Vice President
American Foreign Policy Council
and
Mary Fitzgerald
Hudson Institute

We welcome you and thank you all for being here.

However, before I turn the floor over to you, I want to call upon Mr. Pickett, the ranking Democrat on the R&D Subcommittee respectfully.